What is claimed is:

1.   A method of providing access to help information

5   relating to components of a computer system, comprising:

accessing a help database having data identifying a

plurality of help topics pertaining to a plurality of

components of the computer system;

presenting the plurality of help topics in a user

10   interface based on the data in the help database;

detecting a selection of a help topic through the user

interface;

retrieving help contents of the selected help topic; and

displaying the retrieved help contents.

15

2.   A computer-readable medium having computer-

executable instructions for performing the method of claim 1.

3.   A method as in claim 1, wherein the presenting

20   presents the plurality of help topics in accordance with a

taxonomy structure.

4.   A method as in claim 3, wherein the help database

contains data specifying a mapping between each of the

25   plurality of help topics and a corresponding node of the

taxonomy structure.

5. A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions for performing the method of claim 3.

6. A method as in claim 1, wherein the help database contains data specifying a search keyword associated with said each help topic.

7. A method as in claim 6, wherein the user interface includes an interface element for prompting a selection to perform a keyword search.

8. A method as in claim 1, wherein the help database contains data specifying an index string associated with said each help topic.

9. A method as in claim 8, wherein the user interface includes an interface element presenting an option to view index strings of the help topics.

10. A method as in claim 1, wherein the help contents of said selected help topic are stored in a file written in a markup language.

11. A method as in claim 1, wherein the help contents of said selected help topic include an active component, and the displaying includes executing the active component.

12. A method as in claim 11, wherein the active component pertains to an automated fix.

13. A method as in claim 11, wherein the active component pertains to problem/incident escalation to a remote network site.

14. A method as in claim 11, wherein the active component is a script.

15. A method as in claim 11, wherein the displaying includes confirming that the help contents for the selected help topic are trusted before executing the active component.

16. A method as in claim 15, wherein the displaying includes bypassing security detection when executing the active component.

17. A method as in claim 1, wherein the retrieving includes obtaining a Unified Resource Locator (URL) associated with the selected help topic and obtaining the help contents for the selected help topic based on the Unified Resource Locator.

18. A computer-readable medium having computer-readable instructions for performing the method of claim 17.

19. A method as in claim 17, wherein the Unified Resource Locator for the selected topic identifies a local directory of the computer system.

5   20. A method as in claim 17, wherein the Unified Resource Locator for the selected topic identifies a location accessible to the computer system through a network.

21. A method as in claim 1, further comprising:
10   receiving a call from an application identifying a help topic; and
   retrieving help contents for the help topic identified in the call.

15   22. A computer-readable medium having computer-readable instructions for performing the method of claim 21.

23. In a computer system having a graphic user interface including a display and a user interface selection device, a
20   method of providing help contents pertaining to components of a computer system, comprising:
   displaying, in a user interface area, help categories on a taxonomy structure, said taxonomy structure categorizing a plurality of help topics pertaining to a plurality of
25   components of the computer system;
   upon receiving a selection of a help category on said taxonomy structure, displaying in the user interface area help

topics in the taxonomy structure under the selected help category; and

upon receiving a selection of one of the displayed help topics, displaying help contents associated with the selected

5 help topic.

24. A computer-readable medium having computer-readable instructions for performing the method of claim 23.

10 25. A method as in claim 23, further including displaying an interface element for prompting a selection of performing a keyword search for help topics.

26. A method as in claim 23, further including

15 displaying an interface element for prompting a selection of viewing the help topics by index.

27. A method of providing help contents to a computer system, comprising:

20 receiving a help service update package presenting modifications to a help service system on the computer system, said modifications including adding a help topic to the help service system; and

updating a help service database to include the help

25 topic, the help service database containing data identifying a plurality of help topics pertaining to different components of the computer system.

28. A method as in claim 27, further including displaying a user interface to present the plurality of help topics for user access according to the data in the help service database identifying the plurality of help topics.

5

29. A computer-readable medium having computer-readable instructions for performing the method of claim 28.

30. A method as in claim 27, wherein the receiving

10   includes authenticating the help service update package based on a certificate included with the help service update package.

31. A method as in claim 27, wherein the step of

15   receiving includes retrieving from the help service update package a package description file containing a description of the modifications presented by the help service update package.

20   32. A method as in claim 27, wherein the updating includes storing in the help service a mapping between the added help topic and a taxonomy structure categorizing the plurality of help topics identified in the help service database.

25

33. A computer-readable medium having computer-readable instructions for performing the method of claim 32.

34. A method as in claim 27, wherein the help service update package includes update information regarding a content store of the help service system for identifying trusted help contents, and wherein the updating includes updating the

5 content store according to the update information.

35. A computer-readable medium having a computer-readable data structure forming an update package for updating a help service system on a computer system, comprising:

10 a first field containing data identifying a help topic to be added to a help service system; and

a second field containing data identifying a mapping between the help topic and a taxonomy structure of the help service system for categorizing help topics installed on the

15 help service system for a plurality of components of the computer system.

36. A computer-readable medium as in claim 35, wherein the data structure further includes a package description file containing a description of modifications to the help service

20 system presented in the update package.

37. A computer-readable medium as in claim 35, wherein the data structure further includes a certificate for

25 authenticating the update package.

38. A method of accessing help contents from an application on a computer system, comprising:

requesting, by the application, retrieval of help contents at a location indicated by a link, the link including

5   a first portion identifying a namespace of help contents registered with a help service of the computer system;

invoking the help service to retrieve the help contents from the location indicated by the link; and

displaying the retrieved help contents.

10

39. A method as in claim 38, wherein the help contents includes an active component.

15